From Townland to Township: The Complex Evolution of a Dissipative Famine-Irish Community in County Durham

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For my Great Grandfather, John McManus, and for Francis Harvey, and all the other original Irish Immigrants to Crook and Billy Row; all testament to strong genes and a hopeful sense of survival.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 1840's Ireland, the resulting chaos and social dissipation caused by, 'The Famine'; generally accepted as the period between 1845 and 1850, created an extraordinary discontinuity and transformation of what had been for centuries a relatively ordered way of life. Especially in the congested western regions of rural Ireland, this transformation had included subsistence peasant farmers resisting emigration and increasing their landholding, becoming better-off graziers, while thousands of their poorer landless neighbours fled from the principal Irish community setting of the time – 'the townland' (Jones, 1999). In Ireland, the townland is a small rural division of the parish measuring about 350 acres (Connel, Cronin and O'Dalaigh, 1998). These poorer immigrant workers

toiled in an extraordinary range of occupations worldwide as well as the Northeast of England (Cooter, 1976).

Set against the background of famine and social upheaval in Ireland, and industrial expansion and demise in the Township of Crook and Billy Row, County Durham, England, this book examines the historical evidence that made this township such an attractor for Irish immigrants and considers elements of the social make-up of the Irish community that settled there.

In Chapter 2 an account of the rapid industrial expansion of Crook and Billy Row is given. The expansion occurred conveniently for Irish emigrants fleeing the catastrophic events in famine-torn Ireland.

In Chapter 3 anecdotal accounts of the life histories of two Irish immigrants who settled in Crook and Billy Row, John McManus, and Francis Harvey, are illustrated. The academic perils of presenting these two accounts as non-personal calculations of a social reality is acknowledged. They are used more to

provide an individual, concise, and interesting insight into a minute fragment of Irish life, rather than to suggest a synthesis between the observational information known about them and a much broader understanding of the Irish psyche. Fitzpatrick provides a good exposition of a suitable use of case histories in Irish studies (Fitzpatrick 1994).

In Chapter 4 the impact of Irish disorder is assessed and concludes that, the stereotype of the unruly Irish was hardly realistic at Crook.

In Chapter 5 State welfare is considered and it is seen not just as a benefit to Irish immigrants but also as a less than sympathetic system to those unable to work. The forced removal of some Irish families in the latter group is given and the Auckland Union, which administered the Crook area, took a forceful stance on removal of Irish families back to Ireland.

In Chapter 6 the affect that the Catholic Church had on Crook's Irish immigrants is provided and emphasises its powerful capacity to provide social, cultural, and economic welfare.

In Chapter 7 a description of instability phases in Crook's later history is given and, to assist the reader, the theory of change I use to interpret the research findings, Complex Systems Theory, is provided.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I set out the research findings overall and conclude that, whilst aware of the empirical limitations of the study, complexity, and dissipative systems theory is an appropriate model of social change. Furthermore, it is one which could be applied in more comprehensive studies. The research also gives some insight into the idea that the social system of the Irish at Crook was evidently one which displayed 'free will' rather than one in which the Irish were dominated by the host culture (Lowe, 1974, 1989).

2. A DEVELOPING TOWNSHIP

By the time of the Irish Famine, the Township of Crook and Billy Row had already experienced a change of great economic magnitude and was well into its evolution from a pre-industrial society to a vibrant industrial one. Here Irish immigrants would eventually settle into a new order of social, economic, and political certainty and promise.

Yet, prior to the nineteenth century, Crook had been little more than a hamlet situated in a predominately agricultural environment. The village and its surroundings were one very insignificant element in a much larger world system of inextricably linked and layered entities. Unlike the Irish ecological environment, however, Crook's sensitive dependence

and potential to evolve lay in what was below the ground rather than its agrarian surface. Based upon its ecological characteristics, a powerful potential capacity for social and cultural development existed beneath the ground at Crook – coal. Not just any coal but some of the very best quality coking-coal in the world, it was claimed.

At a time of massive industrial expansion in the West, the production of steel was a crucial factor in the growth of state economies, and capitalist entrepreneurs did not overlook the potential of Crook's quality coal deposits. Like many other areas of County Durham, the free-energy environment of Crook had been associated with coalmining well before the Industrial Revolution began. In 1425, on the death of Ralph Neville, the first Earl of Westmoreland, we learn that his family were the owners of a considerable area of land at Crook and,

> …..a mine of coal in Wodyfal, of the total value of forty shillings (Inquisition Post Mortem of Ralph Neville, quoted in Lloyd (1916, p. 2).

By 1800 this coalmine had developed considerably and was ten fathoms deep and employed six men with an annual output of 2600 tons (ibid, p. 19). However, because of the under-developed transport system in the area at that time, the coal produced at Crook was unable to be moved easily to the coast for shipping into a wider and more dynamic world market. This was soon to change, and with it the whole structure and complexity of the locality.

In 1801, the population of Crook was a mere 193 persons living in a state of social regularity in thirty-six houses scattered about the area. Thirty of the forty families were employed in an economy of agriculture (Census of Crook and Billy Row, 1801) and this social stability hardly changed for the next thirty years. In 1831 the population of 200 was much the same as it had been previously (Census of Crook and Billy Row, 1831), but in subsequent years, chaotic processes leading to uncertainty and unpredictability began to upset the old rural, agrarian order.

Where there had previously been only a few houses, a small coal pit and a water mill, the town developed considerably between the years 1831 and 1841, and the population increased almost five times as fast as it had in the preceding two hundred years (Census, 1831and 1841).

In 1846 the West Emma and West Lucy Pits were opened and, incredibly, by 1849 over 500 coke ovens were being operated (Lloyd, ibid, p. 21). Another important development was in the transport system and by 1841 seventy labourers were working on a new railway in the area (British Parliamentary Papers, 3, pp. 192-193). Thus, the township by this time was expanding rapidly because of its crucial relationship to deposits of excellent quality coking-coal, facilitated through the development of machinery and the extension and improvement of a pre-industrial transport system.

In the 1830's an important advance had been made in the design of machinery used in the processes of both mining and transporting coal. Most significant here

was the moveable steam engine. Such innovations are attributable to individuals whose originality influences every aspect of the system and everyone within it. Accordingly, we can ascribe much of the engineering genius of the time to the great technologist George Stephenson. He remained the chief advocate for the development of steam railway locomotives and, additionally, safety lamps to avoid explosions in coalmines. His moveable steam engine allowed coal to be transported from the more inland areas of County Durham and replaced horse and manual labour in the ascent of the mineral from coalface to surface, accelerating production and dispersal (Encyclopaedia Britannica online).

As the demand for the production of Crook's coal and coke increased there was a consequent need for labour-power to ensure production. Paradoxically, the period of The Irish Famine occurred at a time of growing opportunity and demand for labour-power in other similar places to Crook. Accordingly, by 1851, in this comparatively small area, the population had reached 2764, of which 134 were of a nationality and

culture previously unseen in Crook's history – the Irish (Census of Crook and Billy Row, 1851). A demand for excess labour-power had occurred simultaneously with a phenomenal increase in immigration brought on by an Irish catastrophe. In less than two decades, the Crook area had experienced a transformation - from the parochial simplicity of an agrarian culture to a dynamic industrial, multi-cultural complexity and, to all intents and purposes, *totally dependent upon coal.*

Between 1841 and 1851, the thousands of Irish emigrants who came to England, Wales and Scotland had greatly increased the Irish-born population, from 417,000 to 727,000 (Census Reports, England, Scotland, and Wales, 1841, 1861). In County Durham alone, the increase was from 5407 to 18501: from 3.5 per cent to 6 per cent of the total population of the county (Census of County Durham, 1841 and 1851). By the 1860's, however, this phenomenal increase, and the chaotic processes attending it, had stabilized sufficiently to allow the system to settle into a new social, economic, and political trajectory. For rural

Irish immigrants, the new social order in which they found themselves was alien to the society from which most of them had come – a one based entirely on subsistence agriculture and the communal social organization and relationships of the townland.

In the next chapter we turn to some of the nature and characteristics of Ireland at this period.

3. FROM TOWNLAND TO TOWNSHIP

Diametrically and concomitantly with Crook's transformation, parts of 1840's Ireland had experienced a progressive degradation of the system's former internal structure, and with it the dislocation and eventual transformation of an older, settled, and regular way of life. Like Durham in the nineteenth century, social change in Ireland was being driven by a diverging sensitive dependence on the historical conditions prevailing in local areas; not only from a simple analysis of agrarian in Ireland and coal in Durham but in a more complex explanation.

Accordingly, variation in the causes accelerating emigration during the famine period can be seen in the sensitive dependence of different geographical areas of Ireland. For instance, while the associated issues of land clearance and agrarian capitalism were important factors in County Roscommon - see as an example (Jones, 1999, pp.85-103), the same cannot be said of County Tyrone, where a sensitive dependence on spinning and linen weaving existed which, when the linen market failed, caused many to emigrate (McEvoy, 1802; Bailey, 1834, p.71). The study of early nineteenth century Irish labour migration illustrates in broader terms these complex provincial and regional disparities (Harris, 1994, pp. 56-73).

The situation was exacerbated by an under-response by the authorities to the catastrophic conditions. Scally describes the conditions in County Roscommon institutions as overwhelming and in the countryside 'hordes of beggars and dying' lined the turnpikes while thousands lay with fever in their cabins (Scally, 1993, p. 109). The strong conviction of the British Government was that the land system in

Ireland would need to be reformed before peace and tranquillity returned (Mattimoe, 1992; Scally, ibid.).

To make matters worse, between 1790 and 1841 the population of Ireland had increased by about 3 million to 8,175,124 (Population of Ireland, 1841). The subjects of this increase, in the west at least, were mainly poor, Catholic, Gaelic-speakers who were not really engaged to any extent in a cash economy but depended upon subsistence farming to survive. John McManus and Francis Harvey were two of these Irish immigrants who settled in the Township of Crook and Billy Row.

About 1848, at the age of ten, my great grandfather, John McManus left the Townland of Keadue, in the Parish of Kilronan, County Roscommon in the west of Ireland, and emigrated to England. Orphaned by the famine, John was brought there by other kin. By the mid 1860's he was married and settled in Crook, eventually bringing up eleven children there. We know that, in general, the Irish migrated to urban-industrial areas like Crook where John's unskilled labour was in most demand (Hunt, 1973). John died

at Crook at the age of eighty-four, having spent all his working life as a coke-drawer in the township. The tools of his trade were hardly sophisticated - a long handled rake used to remove the coke from the ovens. As a coke-drawer, daily, John took on the hottest and dirtiest job in the process of coke manufacture (Smith,1974).

Ruth-Ann Harris describes John's circumstances quite accurately when she states that the Irish:

> ……left Ireland because they were not needed, and they arrived where they were needed, taking jobs unwanted by others. Willing to man the lowest echelons of industry and to work harder than anyone else in the same situation, they put to shame their English counterparts who had learned their rights far too well to satisfy some employers (Harris, 1994, pp.162).

John seems to have effortlessly maintained the status quo of a poor Irish immigrant and, thus, his social characteristics may be viewed in that sense as, in the language of complex systems analysis, 'symmetry preserving'. It is likely that, occupationally, he held little ambition to better himself and, as a coke worker, he remained one of the least honoured and most

disadvantaged workmen in the town. But although he failed to rise out of unskilled work, all John's sons took on semi-skilled work as coal hewers.

Ulster, in the east, from which province Francis Harvey originated, conveniently looks across to Britain and onward to mainland Europe and has been the target of much historical invasion, making it less socially and economically isolated. In contrast, John McManus' origins were in Connaught. Facing the wide Atlantic Ocean, Connaught has always been associated with an isolation and 'exclusion' which, for Cromwell at least, was equated with 'hell' (Berresford-Ellis, 1975). This relatively safe isolation of the west had implications for social, economic, and cultural as well as religious change.

As late as the eighteenth century the Province of Connaught was not only regarded as the most Catholic part of Ireland but the nature and characteristics of its places and people were considered 'individual'. It is said that travellers who ventured to cross the Shannon River in those days had the sensation of entering another world (Simms,

1958). This is significant, for an undisturbed genetic Gaelic population like the one John McManus came from, speaks much about the Gaelic culture of resisting change and maintaining the status quo; maintaining 'symmetry'.

In the early eighteenth century the ancestral region of John McManus and his family, Kilronan Parish, was claimed to be 'the most impenetrable part of the kingdom' (Simms, ibid.). The 3 main villages in the Parish today; Keadue, Ballyfarnon and Arigna, are all within a couple of miles of each other. In the mid 1700's, however, a new road system made the district more accessible. Further improvements were made in the mid 1800's to the roads leading from north Roscommon to Sligo and to the developing Shannon River navigation around Lough Allen, situated at the foot of Kilronan Mountain (Weld, 1832, pp. 171-2).

In contrast to Ulster's eastern seaboard, Kilronan Parish in Connaught can be seen as culturally and socially averse to economic progress. In 1773 Charles O'Conor's survey of the Parish of Kilronan calculated that there were about 1480 people in the area,

comprised of 370 families – on average, we can visualize mother, father and two children. (O'Conor, 1773, p.178). According to O'Conor, these people, 'barely procure themselves a subsistence, and are utterly useless to the public' (O'Conor, ibid:378). In contrast to Arthur Young's experience of other Irish parishes, O'Conor's 1773 view of Kilronan displays characteristics of a more ancient way of life than was expected from progressives. Indeed, O'Conor was describing a cultural state of 'stasis'. While most of Europe experienced the wake of industrial revolution, Kilronan, it seems, was defying progress; stuck in the symmetry of the past:

> The women are entirely idle and have no manner of employment. They will not attempt the raising of flax, for which they will give no reason, but that none of their ancestors attempted it, and consequently that their lands are unfit for it; but I have this season shewn them the contrary, having for experiment, sown one peck of feed on the banks of the Argnach, and another on the top of one of the driest hills, in a small plot manured last season with lime, and both grew well; the former best adapted for making fine, the latter course yarn. (O'Conor, ibid, p.376).

O'Conor tells us that the Kilronan women stated stubbornly that their grandfathers and fathers had not grown flax, and neither would they. We clearly have here an undisturbed, and resisting, Gaelic population and culture, which was, even at this period of the mid-Industrial Revolution, unprepared to change tradition and was intent on remaining static. Even today the genetic evidence supports what O'Conor found in the Kilronan population – a deep genetic Gaelic culture (Hill et al 2000).

Hill et al, and the observations in O'Conor's survey really matters for two reasons. Firstly, they show the population of the western most counties of Ireland, i.e., Sligo, Galway, Mayo, Roscommon, Leitrim, represent a genetic purity of the Gaelic genetics and culture in Ireland. Secondly, it conforms to the historical reality of that region's non-incursion by outsiders – 'To Hell or Connaught' really expresses this notion.

Francis Harvey's domicile in Ireland was much different to John McManus'. In 1848, when Francis arrived in England with his parents from the

Townland of Gortnagarn in the Parish of Pomeroy, County Tyrone in the Province of Ulster, they were leaving behind a more progressive community whose inhabitants grew flax for spinning. Francis took advantage of a more certain future, initially in the east Durham coalfield. He subsequently spent all his working life as a coalminer in the pits of County Durham – a relatively skilled and esteemed job for the first generation Irish at this early time.

John McManus and Francis Harvey were each continuously employed for approximately fifty years as coke worker and coalminer respectively. Using the limited sample of Westoe Colliery, where biographies show individuals cyclically employed as both coal workers and seamen, David Byrne refutes this characteristic of, 'absolute continuity in the same employment', as a 'myth' when applied to:

> …..nineteenth century industrialism in general and mining in particular….. (Byrne, D. 1996).

By 1861 Francis Harvey was living at Thornley, on the east coast of Durham, with his wife and three children. After the death of his wife, he moved from

Thornley to Esh in the northwest of Durham. There in 1870 he married his second wife, and they added eight more children to the family. From Esh he moved, not so far, to Billy Row and Howden-le-Wear, before finally settling in Stanley Crook.

One of Francis Harvey's personal attributes appears to have favoured promoting social progress. This is exemplified in Francis' writing, in which he conveys a potent example of enthusiasm for progression and interaction with the new order he had found in the Durham coalfield. In a notebook he recorded his poetry, and the mathematical problems he needed to understand to progress his career. (Copy Book of Francis Harvey 1838-1900. Durham County Record Office (hereafter DCRO) /D/X/1194/1). The notebook clearly shows Francis' intention to gain promotion from miner, perhaps to check-weighman at the pit. His fierce determination to improve his literacy, numeracy and creative ability is characterized in the notebook by the obvious intellectual advancement he made over time.

An important aspect of Francis' social quality can be seen in his potential to break away from the 'symmetry preserving' characteristics that John McManus had inherited. Francis had obviously been influenced by the politics of Daniel O'Connell (O'Ferrall, 1985) as part of O'Connell's famous address to the people of Tipperary on 30th. September 1828 was copied into his notebook. Like O'Connell, Francis too hoped,

> …….to see Ireland what she once was and what she ought to be, a nation great, glorious and free, the first flower of the earth and the first gem of the sea. (DCRO, ibid.).

As we can see, in an extract from Francis's poem, 'The Warning by a Working Man', there is a clear sense of his moral entrepreneurship and mission for temperance and family values - a religious and moral lesson clearly aimed at his fellow countrymen in the Crook area:

> The Warning by a Working Man
>
> You true sons of Erin attention
> The truth unto you I'll display

It being my utmost intention
To keep you from going astray
Since to work the Almighty decreed you
And grants to your means for to toil
Why spend it with men who deceive you
And detest the Irish exile

You know the landlord wants your money
To which you in hardships did toil
He's civil he's cheery and funny
While he extracting the spoil
But when he has emptied your pockets
You are showed to the door with distain
Saying get out, you mere Irish blockhead
Else I'll send for the Bobby and then

Your health and your earnings are given
Expressed by celestial decree
The deed is recorded in heaven
And you must accountable be
To keep you on those that's depending
Or sent you by god to maintain
Then hard is the judgment impending
When you the omniscience disdain……..(DCRO, ibid.).

In terms of the segregation/assimilation debate in Irish studies (Fielding, 1993, Hickman, 1995) Francis appears to have reflected the general picture found in the recent work of many writers on the Irish in local communities in Britain, found that they progressively accommodated the host culture while at the same time retaining their loyalties to Catholicism and Irish nationalism (Fielding, ibid, Hickman, ibid).

Leaving these two Irish immigrants to Crook for the moment, when we consider the broader detail of some general characteristics of the Irish community at Crook and Billy Row, we see that in 1851, the developed Township consisted of the town of Crook and several rows of colliery houses together with the areas of Sunniside, Stanley and Billy Row. Of the 2,764 inhabitants, there were 134 Irish-born persons (4.8%) - 101 males and thirty-three females, seven of whom were children. The regional outnumbering of Irish-born females by Irish-born males in the census returns of 1851 and 1861 is a common finding (McDonnell, 1991, p. 71).

The Irish-born were the highest number of county and country-born recorded other than, County Durham (1,845), Yorkshire, (260) and Northumberland (215). At the time of the 1851 Census there were 108 employed Irish-born persons – ninety-nine males and nine females. Children under fourteen, married women at home and the elderly accounted for the 26 Irish-born persons shown as dependant, non-wage earners. Coming from a predominantly agricultural background, these people had little or no industrial experience and held down the jobs that most non-Irish rejected as 'dirty, disreputable and undesirable' (Redford, 1964).

The youngest persons employed were boys of twelve years. Often referred to in the census schedules as 'pit boys', they looked after the mining equipment on the surface and acted as general dog's bodies. Not one Irish-born male over fourteen years was unemployed, while no Irish-born person over the age of sixty was shown as employed. Except for one farm labourer, the Irish-born males were employed either in the coal or coke industry. Apart from one dressmaker, the

employed Irish-born females worked as domestic servants.

The Irish workers in the coke industry at Crook outnumbered the Irish in other work. The Irish coke workers were, at forty-eight (37%), the largest single national group amongst the total of 129 and were considered as the most socially disadvantaged in the town. 433 men were described as 'coalminers', twenty-four (5.5%) being Irish born. This may signify a relatively high level of access to what was a higher status occupation by the Irish at this early time. There is, however, a need for caution in the number of both Irish and non-Irish coal miners stated in the 1851 Census at Crook, and indeed elsewhere. As Smith points out, the term 'coal miner' was used broadly to describe many jobs at the colliery and he qualifies his observation by showing that, 'The most obvious case is the 15-19 age group where we have 81 coal miners. Eighty of these 'coalminers' were in fact boys under fifteen years old and, (most likely an error of transcription) one of whom was, inconceivably, a

woman (Smith, ibid: 24-25). Smith found many more errors of job descriptions.

In 1851 tradesmen and builders probably owned most of the non-colliery rows of houses at Crook while the colliery rows belonged to the colliery owners who provided the house free of rent to the employed head of household (Smith, ibid:18). Of the ninety-nine employed Irishmen, two thirds were single, and three-quarters were lodgers or visitors. Of the thirty-one married men, ten were there without their wives, which is indicative of the high mobility of the Irish at this time. The twenty-one with wives were heads of households, indicating non-discrimination of the Irish in respect of housing provision. It is worth mentioning here the sympathetic and philanthropic Pease family of Durham. A rich Quaker family who owned many of the mines in the area, they were known, as other Quaker families were too, to have kindly assisted the poor Irish during the time of the famine and afterwards (Swift and Gilley, 1984).

Young men predominated in the Irish working

community. From the figures relating to lodgers and boarders, it is apparent that the lack of accommodation for single men, such as a hostel, made them somewhat reliant on the more settled families. A good proportion of lodgers were with Irish families, but twenty English householders also had Irish lodgers. The labour-power of single men was obviously of great value to the pit owners/landlords, yet they seem to have turned a blind eye to their settled workers taking lodgers into their homes.

Whereas no Irish resided in Whitelea Square, in the fifteen houses in Cabies Row there were more Irish than any other in the township. In this row, however, the non-Irish outnumbered the Irish four to one and the density of house occupation was 2.2 persons higher than elsewhere in the town. Migratory workers, shifting about from colliery to colliery as wages fluctuated, took lodgings for various lengths of time and in 1853 it was reported they were living,

> …two in a bed usually and six, eight, or ten to a room; some of the rooms being under six feet high and no more than five yards square, and

> with but one small window' (Public Record Office, 1853).

Incredibly, a comparison of names from the 1851 and 1861 Census' shows that of the 134 Irish-born persons residing in the township in 1851 only one was identifiably still residing there in 1861. This finding is in sharp contrast to findings in York (Finnigan, 1982) and Darlington (Lynch, 1989) and further demonstrates a great degree of mobility of the early Irish migratory workers in the township.

In many cases, the value of additional income for settled families, obtained through their lodgers and boarders, together with the tolerance of the owners, meant health standards were clearly being sacrificed. At this time the community's health would not have been helped by the inadequacy of another basic need – fresh water. By 1855, however, the colliery owners, Bolckow and Vaughan, had made a financial contribution towards the installation of a fountain in the centre of the village green. The water was to be supplied from one of the collieries in that,

> …..thriving place and had hitherto, been

> difficult to obtain in sufficient quantities - for the use of the constantly increasing population and the want of which has been much felt (Bishop Auckland Herald, 1855).

The coal owners could not ignore some responsibility for the health and safety of the local population, for many accounts of avoidable accidents on colliery property were reported in local newspapers. The death at Bitchburn Colliery of a five-year-old Irish girl provides an example. Mary Ann O'Neil was playing near her home when she was knocked down by coal-tubs on an unprotected wagon-way, eight yards from her house. At the subsequent inquest the coroner suggested that the colliery owners provide protection to prevent further accidents. In a frivolous reply, the colliery agent said it would be done, 'if it was possible' (Bishop Auckland Herald, 1.2.1856).

By 1861the total population of Crook and Billy Row was 5,134 and the number of Irish-born had increased to 517 (10%), of whom 318 were males and 199 females (Census of Crook and Billy Row, 1861). Amongst the males there were now 127 coke workers and, at 128, an equal number of coalminers. If we

accept that 'coalminer' was a specific description of 'coal-workers underground', then it can be said that by occupational status, many Irishmen had certainly progressed since the 1850's. Reasons for this progression may have concerned the claim that Catholic Irish fertility was forty percent higher than the rest of the population (Mess, 1928, p.135) therefore, numbers of fit young Irishmen, capable of producing good outputs from the coal face, were plentiful.

When we examine the average number of children of Irish-born parents at Crook, however, the high fertility claim does not necessarily apply between the 1850's and 60's. In 1851 the average number of children in Irish families was 3 and in 1861 2.6. The highest number of children in one family was eight. It may be, however, that Irish couples marrying in the 1860's and afterwards did have larger families in Crook. In the case of my own family, my great grandfather and grandfather had eleven and thirteen children respectively.

Another possibility for occupational progression

down the mines may have been a suitable physique for that work. Suggesting that the Irish were bigger and stronger than most of the English, E.P. Thompson claimed that the Irish provided:

> ……. a supplementary labour force unmoulded by the industrial work-discipline. This discipline ... required steady methodical application, inner motivations of sobriety, forethought, and punctilious observation of contract; in short of, the controlled paying out of energies in skilled and semi-skilled employment. By contrast, the heavy manual occupations at the base of industrial society required a spend-thrift expense of sheer physical energy - an alternation of intensive labour and boisterous relaxation which belongs to pre-industrial labour rhythms, and for which the English artisan or weaver was unsuited both by reason of his weakened physique and his Puritan temperament. ... Thus, to an extra-ordinary degree the employers had the best of a labour supply from the pre-industrial and industrialized worlds (Thompson, 1968, pp. 473-475).

But in 1861, unlike a decade earlier, occupations amongst the Irish were becoming varied and included a cabinetmaker, a blacksmith, a bricklayer, several brickyard workers, a Moravian Minister and a rag gatherer. It appears, however, that the situation of

employed Irish-born females had not improved as their numbers and occupations were the same as they had been ten years earlier.

A comparative view of employment by age of the Irish workers at Crook and Billy Row from the 1851 and 1861 Census' shows that between fifty to sixty per cent of those employed were aged between twenty-one and thirty years. And in the many small, dispersed, Irish coalmining communities that existed in the wider Auckland Census District of Durham, it was the young unmarried workingmen who greatly outnumbered their female counterparts. (Census' of Auckland District, 1851, 1861).

At Crook, the marital status of Irish-born in 1851 and 1861 is striking in the contrast between eighty per cent unmarried males to twenty per cent unmarried females - the predominant age group amongst unmarried males was between eighteen and thirty. The perpetuation of traditional Irish culture and religion would have required constant social interaction between these dispersed communities. If

we make the easy assumption that the majority of Irish-born were Catholics, then at a time when the Catholic Irish were not numerously intermarrying with non-Catholics, they most likely were carefully seeking out those from the same faith.

In an urban environment, during the period in question, it was found that 75% of Irishmen and 79% of Irishwomen married within their nationality (Dennis, 1984). It is interesting to consider the possible recreation pattern of this 'socially' active age group. The early registers of St. Wilfred's Catholic Church at Bishop Auckland, the principal Catholic church in the district, assist here, for they provide much evidence of variation in the topographical origins between Irish brides and grooms (Register of Marriages, St. Wilfred's R.C. Church). The high volume of inter-Irish marriages served to maintain Irish identity and a strong community, as well as affirming a close identification with the Catholic Church.

The next chapter considers the disorder rate amongst the Irish in the area.

4. IRISH DISORDER

By 1856 the increase in the population of the district had brought a corresponding increase in the business of the County Magistrates, as weekly, rather than fortnightly sittings of magistrates at Bishop Auckland commenced (Bishop Auckland Herald, 1.1.1856.). Newspaper reports of drunkenness, disorder and violence amongst a small proportion of the Irish of County Durham at this time were quite common, but statistically they were not too dissimilar to the non-Irish disorder by proportion (McManus,1994). While many such events undeniably concerned the Irish in County Durham, they were a miniscule

number of the total and were often focussed upon by the press.

Some incidents, however, were not always of a minor nature, as when Durham Spring Assizes heard evidence in 1851 of disorder and violence caused at Witton Park, near Crook, by men from the Irish counties of Monaghan and Galway. Matthew Martin, 30 years, John Mahon, 22 years, Patrick Grant, 24 years, Philip Martin, 22 years, John Griffin, 23 years and Patrick McGough, 26 years had violently assaulted George Hart, with intent to do him grievous bodily harm. Hart was a local police officer and on 28th. September 1850 he had been called to a public house where revelry had advanced to riot and one of the party had been wounded. The officer, after ejecting some of the persons, was proceeding to seek a surgeon for the wounded man when he was struck with a poker across his face and immediately afterwards was knocked down by a blow from behind. While on the ground the officer was kicked and seriously injured. The assault was so severe that P.C. Hart lost an eye. He later gave evidence that it

was one of the Martins' who had struck him with the poker. During the same incident another officer was also seriously assaulted and rendered insensible by a savage attack from the Irishmen. A poker and iron spit were produced as being the probable weapons. All except Grant were found guilty and each was sentenced to two years imprisonment, which they saw out in Durham Goal (Durham Chronicle, 14.3.1851).

The early newspaper reports in the Crook district provide a singular lack of reference to the Irish being much involved in crime and disorder (McManus, ibid.). Unlike Durham City in the same period, where it was found (ibid: 33-36) that in both Quarter Sessions and Magistrates Courts, Irish-related crime records were low but, nevertheless, higher than non-Irish crime. Looking at *only* the Quarter Sessions records, however, McDonnell found that, 'very few Irish from Durham City appear' (McDonnell, 1991, p.73).

Another incident had been reported in the neighbouring village of Brandon where several Irishmen, after being confronted and outnumbered by

several Englishmen in a public house, were pursued on leaving and bombarded with stones, one of which struck an Irishman on the head with fatal consequences (Durham Chronicle, 7.8.1871).

Nor was there much to report on nationalist and sectarian conflict. What can be found of the latter is an occasional, brief newspaper articles, with no supporting evidence; as where the Fenian Movement was reported to be, 'somewhat rife in Bishop Auckland…. and Spennymoor', and where it was claimed meetings took place in a private house (Durham Chronicle, 30.6.1871).

The Durham County Constabulary were concerned about the *threat* of Fenianism in the townships, but although strategies to combat it were put in place, for instance a General Order issued by the Chief Constable on 19th.October, 1867 in which he arranges for officers to collect intelligence on the Fenian movement in the county, in reality it was merely preventative policing. The Irish working-class were closely monitored by the police during this period (Swift, 1984, 1986) and the large Irish

population in County Durham at that time was certainly a cause of concern for the Durham County Constabulary.

The police showed a particular interest in the Irish community because of a popular perception by them, and indeed many ordinary citizens, that Irish immigrants had a propensity towards criminality. This perception is borne out by working-class weekly newspapers of the time (Paz, 1986). More particularly, political violence nationally by the Irish was a worrying factor for the police. This concern is reflected in local Orders of the time issued by Lieutenant Colonel George Francis White, the Chief Constable of the Durham County Constabulary.

The tone of these orders would have been influenced by the Chief Constable's regular contact with the Home Office and the overall national picture concerning the problem of Fenianism. On 19th. October, 1867 Lieutenant Colonel White had written a confidential memorandum to Superintendents as follows:

In accordance with the tenor of the confidential circular from the Home Office, dated 28th. September, 1867, and which was read to the Divisional Superintendents assembled at Head Quarters, (sic) the Chief Constable directs that each Superintendent will tell off a sufficient number of sergeants or other discreet and intelligent men in his division whose duty it will be to watch, for the present, the Irish population, and report without delay through him to the Chief Constable, any information they may obtain of Fenian organisation or suspicious movements or persons, such duty to be conducted in such a manner as, if possible, not to attract attention, and the information kept secret. Superintendents will report to the Chief Constable immediately any information of importance they receive in addition to a monthly report in writing as to the state of the Irish population. By authority from the Secretary of State and Justices of the County, the Chief Constable has issued to each Superintendent of the force a limited number of revolver pistols with proportionate ammunition, holsters, and pouches, not to be used by the police on ordinary duty, but only entrusted to select constables in cases of emergency or when employed on service of personal danger. The Superintendents will be held responsible for the custody of these arms, which, as well as cutlasses will, until further orders be kept secure in a chest or other safe place under lock and key but separate from the

> ammunition. (Durham County Constabulary, General Order Book. DCRO, CCP 32 p.211).

The police had good cause to be forearmed. Several riots between the Irish and English inhabitants of County Durham had already taken place in the years prior to this Order being published. For instance, in 1858 public disorder as the result of disharmony between the Irish and English communities had occurred at Consett. Reports of this, and other disturbances of the time, are clearly recorded in the records relating to the county police force.

Yet no serious Irish problems appeared to exist in Crook and little action was needed in the west of Durham. The reason why it had been ordered at all was probably because there was a national problem with Fenianism in the 1860's and the Home Office had been indiscriminative in instructing all police forces, whether problems existed in them or not.

When the popular 'drunken' Irish stereotype was occasionally evident in the Crook area, the local newspaper did not miss the opportunity for a story.

In May 1854 an inquest was held at Willington near Crook on the body of John McGuire, an Irish labourer aged thirty-six. It was reported that the deceased had been drinking for a fortnight and was found lying near Coates' public house by a local man,

> …. who lifted him up, but he only breathed once or twice and died' (Bishop Auckland Herald, 6.6.1854.).

There were no wounds or marks of violence about the body except a lump on the back part of his head, which had probably been caused by a fall. The coroner returned a verdict of death by natural causes.

The Catholic Church frowned on such matters and parishioners who had ambitions in the licencing trade were not encouraged. This was reflected in the attitude of the clergy at Crook to that business. A feature of this model parish was the absence of Catholic public-houses. Here the Canon exercised his authority to the full, and he drove out of the parish more than one Catholic who had opened a 'public', or he made him engage in some other line of business

(The Northern Catholic Calendar, Crook, 1859, p. 55).

To avoid the excesses demonstrated by the case of John McGuire, and aid cultural and religious homogeneity, opportunities for 'soirees', where male and female Irish Catholics came together, were provided by parish organizations such as the Catholic Young Men's Society. Through such societies, one of the Catholic Church's objectives was to provide venues for social evenings as alternatives to licensed premises. Using Liverpool as an example, Lowe suggests that such objectives of the Church were the driving force for a strong Irish community (Lowe, 1989, p. 131).

Although Lowe allows into his understanding an individual dimension, his interpretation tends to miss the human biological construct - which may have been just as much the driving force for the young and virile Irish Catholic men of Crook. They needed to look for partners further afield into the many different Irish communities in the west of the county. For these young men, the total outnumbering of their

female counterparts would certainly have meant that individual and emotional needs, as well as religious and cultural beliefs and practices, were foremost in their minds.

But with the arrival of thousands of Irish immigrants into these new places, the need for social welfare, as well as cultural and religious welfare, was often crucial to individual survival. Two of the most important institutions in this regard were the State-managed Poor Law Unions and the English Catholic Church. The policies and procedures of both these institutions, and how each affected the Irish community, will be addressed in the following two chapters.

5. STATE WELFARE

Although there was full employment in industrial areas such as Crook, there was still a welfare requirement for those temporarily sick or out of work and, critically, those who were not able to support themselves whatsoever. With the latter group, who usually required permanent accommodation in the workhouses, the financial impact on the Poor Law system was great. Outdoor relief was also a costly affair. Between 5th. February and 24th. December, 1863, 475 medical certificates were produced to the Board of Guardians of Auckland Union by individuals claiming outdoor relief. Of these, sixty-nine were from persons having surnames of Irish

origin. Thirty-three of these Irish claimants resided in the district of Crook; twenty-three in the district of Bishop Auckland and thirteen were from other locations in the union (Auckland Poor Law Union, Minutes of Guardians, Medical Certificates Produced, DCRO/U/Ak/1).

Examples from the minutes of Guardians show a variety of ailments. Patrick Cavanagh of Crook produced a certificate showing that he was suffering from tuberculosis and was provided with meat, wine, or ale (ibid, 5.1.1853). William Murphy, aged thirty-one, of Crook, produced a medical certificate for fever and general debility caused by 'hard work'. He was supplied with meat. At the same time, George Riley, aged sixty-two of Crook, suffering from rheumatism (ibid, 16.4.1863.) and Hugh Commesky, aged forty of Crook, suffering from fever (ibid, 10.12.1863), were each given the popular relief of 'beef tea'.

One difficulty concerning the provision of poor relief for Irish immigrants to Britain in the early years was

that they did not have a legal right to the status of 'settlement' in the area in which they made claim. After 1846 this status was achieved by residing in the parish for five years continuously, after which time they were classed as 'irremovable poor'. If these categories of residence and time did not apply, then those claiming relief of more than a temporary nature could be physically removed to the parish in which they had legal settlement.

Accordingly, newly arrived Irish immigrants to Britain in the middle and late 1800's had no legal right to claim long-term poor relief. In 1861 the residential qualification for settlement was reduced from five years to three and in 1865 the period was again reduced to one year. Thus, by 1865, many more immigrants became eligible for poor relief. Nevertheless, some Poor Law Unions were unsympathetic towards the Irish and often returned them to their legal domicile in Ireland. This was a costly process for the Unions, and, for those removed, a physically arduous one (Neal, 1998).

As large numbers of destitute famine refugees arrived, individual Poor Law Unions were faced with protecting local ratepayers from the consequences of Irish poverty. In the port of Liverpool, poor law provision was obviously under severe strain, and during the famine period and several succeeding years, the records of the numbers of Irish poor removed from Liverpool Parish show that 62,900 were sent back to Ireland, 94% of all persons removed from the town (Poor Law Commission, 1847). The threat of removal was successful in other ports like Glasgow and Newport (Select Committee on Poor Removal, 1854). Expenditure on the destitute Irish fell dramatically in these and other places after the removal legislation was evoked between 1847 and 1848 (Neal, 1998 op. cit.).

Thus, the newly arrived 'unsettled' and unemployed Irish arriving at Crook in the early years had the precarious alternative of applying for relief, thereby officially identifying themselves for consideration by the Board of Guardians for removal or struggle-on painfully without relief. If we consider early Poor Law

records in County Durham, there is no obvious prevalence of Irish claimants, no mention whatsoever of matters concerning the Irish community being a drain of the public purse and, other than Auckland Poor Law Union, no reported instances of removals back to Ireland. This is only relative to the records which still exist, for instance Weardale Poor Law Union, DCRO/U/WE/463; Durham City Poor Law Union, DCRO/U/Ddu2; Darlington Poor Law Union, DCRO/U/Da679; Chester-le-Street Poor Law Union, DCRO/U/CS/2. With respect to the whole of England, in the year ending 25th. March 1853, we know that no Irish-born persons were removed from County Durham.

A total of 4,474 removal orders for Irish-born persons were made out during this period and these related mainly to the northwest of England: Liverpool (3549), London (420), Manchester and Preston (217), Newcastle Upon Tyne (24), Bradford, Leeds and Sheffield (124), Surrey (31), Monmouthshire (31), Devon (27), Cheshire (51) (British Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons,1854-1855).

Crook and Billy Row Township was part of the Auckland Poor Law Union, the earliest records of which exist from 1863 (DCRO, U/au/1). As we will see later, the cost of maintaining the poor law in this union seriously concerned the Guardians of the time and several instances of removal were reported. The total annual cost for all townships in the union was £2956.8s.9d. and the highest individual amount rested with the Township of Bishop Auckland, followed by Crook and Billy Row (Minutes of Guardians, 28.4.1864.). The Guardians here had no intention of allowing the desolate Irish to benefit from the poor law account, as on 14th. September, 1865 when they appointed two Guardians to investigate cases of paupers who were removable. Thereafter, the greater number of persons removed were the Irish.

If we equate 'Catholic' with 'Irish' in the minds of the Guardians, there is some evidence to show discrimination against the Irish community. Anti-Catholic feeling certainly did exist, for in 1863 a letter from Charles Bird of the Protestant Alliance, in respect of a bill then before Parliament for the

appointment of Catholic priests as chaplains to prisons, was presented to the board. In support of the Protestant Alliance, two Guardians at Auckland, Mr. Townsend, and the Rev. Hick, spoke for a petition against the bill and the board resolved that they send a Petition to both Houses of Parliament against it (Minutes of Guardians, 5.3.1863). An amendment moved by Mr. Taplin and seconded by Mr. Duff, that, 'the petition be signed by individual members of the board' was, however, lost with only two votes in favour (Minutes of Guardians, 2.4.1863).

Yet, when we look for anti-Irish feeling in the west Durham newspapers, unlike the local newspapers in Durham City at this time (McManus, 1994, pp.36-38), little evidence existed in the reports of the Bishop Auckland Herald or the Auckland Times newspapers. What little does exist can be found in the former newspaper. This comprises the well-known newspaper vernacular of the time, 'An Irish Letter', signed by Judy O'Hooligan, who writes to a young Irishman near Hannibal on the death of his uncle,

> Dear Nephew, ……..as soon as he breathed his last the doctors gave up all hope of his recovery (Bishop Auckland Herald, 1.6.1855.).

In another piece of discourtesy, 'An Irish Legend', we are told about Peter Slemeen, an Irishman who imagines he is seeing the little people (ibid.,1.2.1856.). However, some commiseration is detected in the writing of Mary Rathbone, who wrote a serial in the newspaper entitled, 'A Tale of the Irish Rebellion', and who saw the Catholic Irish as historically coerced by Protestant legislation.

Although the absence of early Auckland Union records does not assist in identifying the true numbers of Irish removed back to Ireland, those of the 1860's are more helpful. On the same day that the Guardians showed support for an amendment to the Irish Poor Removal Bill, they enquired into the cases of Irish paupers who might be removed back home. The cases considered related to John and Thomas Quinn, Catherine Daignan, John Boyle, John, Thomas, Sarah and James McCaul, Cornelius Allon, Margaret Nolan, or Fenwick and her three children and James and

Timothy Gorman, Patrick Flynn and Bernard Hoy. Although the reasoning behind the Guardians' decision was not given, they considered it was not advisable to remove these unfortunate individuals at that time (Auckland Union Minutes of Guardians, 28.5.1863).

Other candidates for removal were sought, however, and in the following month the Guardians were considering another potential removal case, that of the ill-fated children from the Eustace family. The Eustace children, Susannah, Margaret, and Daniel, all under twelve years of age, were resident in the workhouse as one of the parents was dead and the other had deserted them. The cost of looking after the children was charged to the Common Fund for two weeks to get the clerk's opinion on the case (Minutes of Guardians, ibid.).

Later that month at least one of the Guardians felt the need for action in another Irish case. Mr. Kellett gave notice that on the next Board Day he would move that the case of Catherine Daignan be considered

with the intention of, 'removing her to Ireland or to her husband in America' (ibid, 25.6.1863). At a later meeting the Board resolved that Catherine Daignan of Crook, Bridget Griffin of North Bedburn together with her five children and Sarah Toole of Crook be removed to Ireland (ibid, 9.7.1863.). Subsequently, John Thompson, the Relieving Officer for Crook, presented an account to the Board of £1.4s.0d. - his expenses in obtaining orders of removal for '….six Irish Paupers' (ibid, 17.9.1863.).

Early in 1864, the fate of the Eustace children, still residing in the workhouse at the ratepayer's expense, was finally decided. Together with other Irish residents of the workhouse, Bridget Barnhill, Mary Collins and her five children and Alice Middleton, a widow, and her children, they were removed to Ireland (ibid, 4.2.1864). In contrast to these financial savings made through the removal of paupers, the minutes show that at a later date the resident boys' band of the workhouse was provided with new brass musical instruments at a cost of £25.0s.0d., together with the tutorship of a music instructor who was to

be paid an annual salary of £13.0s.0d. On the same page of the minute book the removal of a second Eustace family to Ireland from Bishop Auckland is recorded - James, his wife and six children (ibid, 17.3.1864. and 31.3.1864.).

Others followed in 1865 - Jane Stafford, Bridget Heapby, John Murphy, and his family (ibid, 1.4.1865.) and Elizabeth Kennedy (ibid, 28.9.1865.). An additional order, for the return to Ireland of Patrick Collins and his dependants, was postponed after he produced a medical certificate to the Board showing he was suffering from lameness and debility, which totally prevented him from supporting himself and his family (ibid, 14.9.1865). Nevertheless, the Guardians sought tenders for provision for the family's return to Ireland. The submission of Patrick Collins' medical certificate was followed by other certificates from his family; Ann, eleven years, Mary, six years, John, five years, who were all suffering from fever, at a time when many cases of typhus were being reported to the authorities (ibid, 28.9.1865). During the year 1866, the Auckland Board of Guardians continued to

pursue their policy of removing Irish paupers to Ireland, the first being William Cullen (ibid, 18.1.1865).

Between 1863 and 1866 eight Scottish persons, Thomas Coulthard, his wife and five children and William Chambers, were removed. There is, however, little evidence in the minutes of English or Welsh persons being removed (ibid, 4.1.1866.).

In the Auckland Union, it is interesting to note a relative departure from Cooter's overall finding, that, fewer than half the Irish deportation orders were carried out (Cooter, 1976.). It was, indeed, the case that between the 1850's and 70's in local places with similar Irish populations to the Auckland Union, such as Tow Law, Durham City and Darlington, no removal orders were even made. It is difficult to ascertain if the primary concern of the Auckland Guardians was to protect the interests of ratepayers or the poor. The impressions given in the proceedings of the Union are of a generous, but overwhelmingly highly efficient, regime run by some liberal minded men, but containing others with a strong conservative

and protestant ethic. When it came to hard decisions, the latter may have believed the Catholic Irish had fewer human rights than the English and so, did not hesitate to influence their removal where applicable.

6. CHURCH WELFARE

The impact of Irish emigration on the volume of Roman Catholic parishioners in 19th. Century England was phenomenal. In the North East of England, of the 100,000 Catholics estimated to be in County Durham and Newcastle in 1882 three quarters were Irish, or of Irish descent (Cooter, 1975.). In 1839, Gustave de Beaumont claimed that the,

> …….Irishman believes that there is nothing permanent or certain in the world but his religion…the Irish people exists in its church…….there it occupies the only ground that has never given way beneath its feet (De Beaumont, 1839).

Later in the century the English Catholic Church anticipated increased workloads for its priests as thousands of poor Irish emigrated to improve their social and economic situations. For the most part, the Catholic Church played its part compassionately in assisting the welfare of these immigrants. By the late 1840's Irish immigration to Crook was already beginning to be noticed by the church and, accordingly, Father Thomas Wilkinson, the parish priest at Crook, anticipating an increase in parishioners,

> …..settled down in the winter of 1848 to open a mission and to evangelise the neighbouring hills and dales (The Northern Catholic Calendar, Historical Sketches of Missions, Crook, 1859 p.3).

Thereafter it is said 'Father Tom' was,

> ……in his element in that colony of devoted Irish miners (McNicholas and Maloney, 1990 p.16).

Before the influx of Irish to Crook there had been only four Catholic families dwelling in the village, and they went regularly to Mass. The Catholic children went to school at Wolsingham, where Father

Wilkinson had converted a house into a school and a chapel (Northern Catholic Calendar, 1895 pp.52-56). But these were hardly substantial arrangements for saving the great numbers of Irish souls who subsequently began arriving in the area. Accordingly, by 1851 the Reverend Wilkinson had persuaded his wealthy father to give him a plot of land in the town, at the top of Dowfold Hill, and a presbytery, church and school were built to provide a spiritual and educational base for the rapidly developing community (ibid.).

On Wednesday, 25th October 1854 the solemn dedication of the newly built Roman Catholic Church of Our Lady Immaculate and St. Cuthbert, was performed by the Bishop of Hexham. The personal involvement in community life of Father Wilkinson (who later became the bishop of the diocese), and the priests who followed him, made the church at Crook a useful supporting institution on which the Irish could rely.

There is estimated to be a ten-year gap between the arrival of a substantial number of immigrants and their impact on parish statistics (Tweedy, 1979 pp. 21-27) and over the next two decades the number of Irish parishioners at Crook increased rapidly. By 1870 the population of the mission was around 2,000; incredibly, only about 300 were English (ibid: 54). It was said that they were,

> ….good and simple people who cling to the spot…….to which they came in the days of the famine (ibid p. 56).

The sense of continuity and stability, which they undoubtedly felt in their new homes, was due in no small part to the Catholic Church and its hard-working clergy.

There is no question that the Crook Irish were a devout and generous band of Catholics. In the early years, the total number of parishioners was about 2,000 including those at Willington. Each year, during Easter, Catholics are required to go to confession and communion and in 1861 Easter communicants were 1263 in number (63%), and in subsequent years this

high percentage continued – 1862, 1319; 1863, 1218; 1865, 1142; 1866, 1370; 1867, 1337; 1868, 989 (ibid p. 56). As an average, the percentage of those attending was 62%. If we compare the numbers of Catholics attending 'Easter duty' at Crook with those attending in the Lancashire parishes of Liverpool and Preston, the devoutness of the Crook Catholics becomes clear. In 1855 in Liverpool, it is estimated that 35% of the Catholics in the parish attended communion; this rose in 1865 to 43% but decreased to 32% in 1871. The Parish of Preston did a little better with 50% attending communion on average over the years (Burke, T. 1910).

Furthermore, the dedication of the Crook parishioners can be seen in the late 1860's and early 70's when the now promoted, Canon Wilkinson sought recruits for the multi-national volunteer infantry formed to protect the Papal States – the Zouaves. Most were recruited from the young Irish men of the parish and those selected were sent to the Vatican to defend the Pope (The Northern Catholic

Calendar, 1859 p. 56; McNicholas and Moloney, op. cit.). The type of men required would be:

> ……possessed of a little money (£25 a year if possible)…….who come for one purpose – viz. to defend the cause of God, and to fight against the cause of Satan…..There is plenty to be scandalised at, and plenty to be discontented at, and if men have not got the one idea "Quis ut Deus" deep in their hearts – they will get more harm here, (Italy) than in a bad street in Newcastle (Ushaw College Archive).

The latter is an excerpt from a letter to Cannon Wilkinson from the Vatican in which the arrival of a recruit named Riley is acknowledged and advice on the required type of recruit is given. The devoutness of the Crook Catholic Irish is further exemplified in the numerous accounts given of the generosity of the poor parishioners in the donations they gave for church maintenance (Northern Catholic Calendar, 1859 p.55).

The moral, religious and social welfare provided by the Catholic Church included sickness and burial funds, saving schemes, and building societies and, importantly, membership of the Catholic Young

Men's Society. In collaboration with the church, the Catholic Young Men's Society had been founded about 1848 during a period of cultural upheaval where religion and morality were increasingly becoming threatened by a culture of public houses and brothels. Pleas by the church for,

> ……the formation of new societies in the larger towns and cities where innocent amusements were few and the demoralization of drink was ubiquitous. (General Conference of the Catholic Young Men's Society, 1888).

were, thus, loud and spirited. Accordingly, as well as opening reading rooms and lending libraries to parishioners who were prepared to pay subscriptions, branches of the society sponsored concerts, theatre performances and public lectures on such subjects as temperance.

A branch of the Catholic Young Men's Society, dedicated to St. Joseph, was in existence at Crook and Billy Row during the 1880's (Records of the RC Church of Our Lady Immaculate and St. Cuthbert, Crook, DCRO/RC/Cro9/1). The objectives of the

society were the intellectual and moral improvement of young men and the regular practice of their religion. The society particularly encouraged members to frequent the sacraments of Confession and Communion, mutual improvement, and the extension of the spirit of religion and brotherly love. This would be achieved through attention to religious practice, public lectures, private classes, a library, and a reading room.

The club had a membership of eighty-two young men and boys who paid a quarterly subscription of one shilling and assembled weekly in the playroom of the school. The Parochial Account Book contains the only record available of St. Joseph's Young Catholic Men's Society. It includes lists of young men who were members of the club in 1880 and 1882; account of expenditure of St. Joseph's Club, 1883; minutes of a general meeting of St. Joseph's Club 6th. February 1882 and minutes of a meeting of the Committee of St. Joseph's Club, 7th. February 1882. (DCRO/RC/Cro9/1).

We learn from the minutes of meetings that the club provided entertainment, often poetry readings, where non-members could be admitted for one penny. Such arrangements were given a 'vote of thanks to the President and a hearty clap of hands' (Minutes of Meeting, 6.2.1882). The use of newspapers and magazines were procured on a daily and weekly basis for the use of members. These included the Daily Chronicle, Shamrock, Young Ireland, Weekly Freeman, and the Universe (Parochial Account Book, receipt, 27.3.1882).

Young Ireland published exciting Irish tales and sketches while The Weekly Freeman, an agricultural journal, contained a political cartoon and advocated the measures generally of the Liberal and Reform Party and of the Roman Catholics of Ireland. Shamrock published illustrated serials and complete stories (Newspaper Press Directory, 1884). The Universe, also with clear political leanings, had,

> ……sprang into being more because normal newspapers had become abhorrent to Catholics, in dealing with the issue of the Papal

> States, than of any sense of positive need to provide a Catholic newspaper (Edwards and Storey,1985).

The Catholic Young Men's Society at Crook arranged for useful books belonging to the library to be newly bound as soon as the funds allowed, and an instruction was given that the books be kept in good repair. The collection in the library included volumes one to eight of the Popular Educator and Pickwick Parochial Account Book, (op. cit. receipt, 20.2.1882.). Club members regularly used facilities in the reading room in these years - evident from the high volume of gas supplied to warm the room (ibid. 22.2.1882, DCRO RC/Cro9/1).

Although the Catholic Young Men's Society was clearly an adjunct to the conventional Catholic Irish education system of the time it also provided financial support. Under the auspices of the society a fund, entitled 'Our Lady's Relief Fund', was in existence at Crook in the 1850's and 1860's (ibid, Parochial Accounts). It appears to have been predominantly a sickness and burial fund, operating as a kind of credit

union. The propensity of the Irish to form welfare clubs of various kinds, especially sick clubs to protect wages when workers were unable to attend their employment, is well documented (Report on the state of the Irish in Great Britain. H.C. 1836. Evidence, pp.71-72) and the formation of such clubs were encouraged and created by the Church (Lowe, 1974).

The President of the Crook fund was the parish priest and fund members, all male, paid monthly instalments. Those who did not promptly repay loans were fined four pence on each occasion they defaulted. The disbursements of cash to members are not given in detail, and we are not told the reasons and purposes for disbursement - absence from employment and funeral expenses are most likely to have been the main purpose. Although church welfare assisted in shoring-up the economic vulnerability of the Irish community, economic survival, however, depended on more complex elements than this one institution. In the next chapter some complexity and instability in the system and the dissipation it produced is outlined.

7. COMPLEX SYSTEMS. RECURRING INSTABILITY AND SOCIAL DISSIPATION. SMALL CAUSES HAVE LARGE EFFECTS, ONCE AGAIN

In the Irish famine phase-changes, the places of John McManus and Francis Harvey had exhibited complexity and dissipative structures, socially, economically, and culturally. So, too areas like Crook in the Durham Coalfield and its complex systems, also experienced the same in later years. These

complex structures arise as a system moves away from equilibrium and self-organizes to enhance its dissipation through various processes, as Crook eventually did.

The story of Crook in 'equilibrium', which I have provided in the afore-given chapters, lasted for many years, but after 1860, however, two additional phases of 'far from equilibrium' can be identified in Crook's history. During these phases many individuals from the Irish community, again, moved to other places. In the case of the families of John McManus and Francis Harvey it is known that individuals dissipated to Derbyshire, Yorkshire, Warwickshire, Surrey, and Middlesex. In each case, the motive of change was invariably economic and connected with the coal industry (Webb, 1921), to which Crook, and many more towns in the northeast of England, were sensitively dependent.

In 1874, the price of coal was reduced, prompting the coal owners to reduce miner's wages. Living standards deteriorated in the community and a short strike took

place, which the miners could not sustain. Further ineffective strikes followed in subsequent years as the price of coal continued to fall.

The threat of a fifteen per cent reduction in wages in 1892 resulted in workers taking more concerted strike action, this time over a twelve-week period. When they did return, however, the miners had merely succeeded in achieving the lesser reduction of ten per cent in their wages. Afterwards, countless workmen gave up their employment, many choosing to emigrate with their families.

The 1920's and 1930's again saw extreme levels of unemployment in the township. In 1938, it was reported that seventy-one per cent of the long-term unemployed in Crook had been without work for five years or more and that Crook was then,

> …an area that has for some time been considered as doomed without an industrial future (Pilgrim Trust 1938).

Thereafter, coalmines in the area were closed at an alarming rate. By 1963, no productive coalmines

existed, and the last coke works were closed in 1965. By 1991, twelve and a half per cent of the workforce was unemployed, while one third of those in employment were working outside Crook (Census of Crook, 1991).

The small cause of cheaper coal had resulted in a disastrously large effect on the community. Crook's sensitive dependence on coal, which had brought Crook into existence as a large and complex settlement and on which the retail trade, service and craft occupations depended, had also contributed to Crook's social and economic demise.

In the next few pages, I want to promote complexity theory as an appropriate model to analyse the kind of complex relationships that I have discussed in this book. Indeed, the complex story of John McManus *before* his emigration from Ireland has also been observed elsewhere using this model of social change (McManus, 2023).

No simple definition exists of the evasive concept of complexity. Complex systems may be conceived of, nevertheless, as containing more possibilities than can be actualised (Luhmann (1985, p. 25). Useful attempts at characterization do exist in the work of reputable writers. For an exposition of dissipative social systems see, Harvey, and Reed, (1994, pp. 371-411). For an explanation of the concept of 'multi-layered' society see Bagguley, Mark-Lawson, Shapiro, Urry, Walby, and Warde, (1990) For a more comprehensive explanation of complexity theory generally see: Prigogine, and Stengers, (1984, p.12) and as a good starting point to comprehension, see, Cilliers, (1998) and Byrne, (1998).

To provide a short general description, I draw heavily on one of them here, (Cilliers, 1998), and offer the following ten components. of complexity.

1. Complex systems consist of many elements. When the number is relatively small, the behaviour of the elements can often be given a formal description in conventional terms. However, when the number

becomes sufficiently large, conventional means not only become impractical, but they also cease to assist in any understanding of the system.

2. Many elements are necessary, but not sufficient. The grains of sand on a beach do not interest us as a complex system. To constitute a complex system, the elements must *interact*, and this interaction must be *dynamic*. A complex system changes with time. The interactions do not have to be physical; they can also be thought of as the transference of information.

3. The interaction is rich, i.e., any element in the system influences, and is influenced by, quite a few other ones. The behaviour of the system, however, is not determined by the exact number of interactions associated with specific elements. If there are enough elements in the system (of which some are redundant), several sparsely connected elements can perform the same function as that of one richly connected element.

4. The interactions themselves have several important characteristics. Firstly, the interactions are non-linear.

A large system of linear elements can usually be collapsed into an equivalent system that is very much smaller. Non-linearity also guarantees that small causes can have large results, and vice versa. It is a precondition for complexity. That small causes can have large results is a concept which really matters in the analysis of the data presented in this book.

5. The interactions usually have a short range, i.e., information is received primarily from immediate neighbours. Long-range interaction is not impossible, but practical constraints usually force this consideration. This does not preclude wide-ranging influence - since the interaction is rich, the route from one element to any other can usually be covered in a few steps. As a result, the influence gets modulated along the way. It can be enhanced, suppressed, or altered in several ways.

6. There are loops in the interactions. The effect of any activity can feed back onto itself, sometimes directly, sometimes after several intervening stages. This feedback can be positive (enhancing, stimulating)

or negative (detracting, inhibiting). Both kinds are necessary. The technical term for this aspect of a complex system is recurrency.

7. Complex systems are usually open systems, i.e., they interact with their environment - another concept that really matters in our analysis of data here. As a matter of fact, it is often difficult to define the border of a complex system. Instead of being a characteristic of the system itself, the scope of the system is usually determined by the purpose of the description of the system and is thus often influenced by the position of the observer. This process is called framing. Closed systems are usually merely complicated rather than complex. In the present study, I have set the scope of the system in a frame which covers Ireland and the Northeast of England.

8. Complex systems operate under conditions far from equilibrium. There must be a constant flow of energy to maintain the organisation of the system and to ensure its survival. Equilibrium here is another word for death.

9. Complex systems have a history. Not only do they evolve through time, but their past is co-responsible for their present behaviour. Any analysis of a complex system that ignores the dimension of time is incomplete, or at most a synchronic snapshot of a diachronic process.

10. Each element in the system is ignorant of the behaviour of the system, it responds only to information that is available to it locally. This point is vitally important. If each element 'knew' what was happening to the system, all the complexity would have to be present in that element. This would either entail a physical impossibility in the sense that a single element does not have the necessary capacity or constitute a metaphysical move in the sense that 'consciousness' of the whole is contained in one unit. Complexity is the result of a rich interaction of simple elements that only respond to the limited information each of them are presented with. When we look at the behaviour of a complex system, our focus shifts from the individual element in the system to the complex structure of the system. The complexity emerges

because of the patterns of interaction between the elements.

Let us illustrate these characteristics through some examples. Consider a snowflake. From a distance it appears to be a simple object, but when we examine it closer it reveals remarkable detail. The snowflake is arranged hexagonally with each of the six 'branches' showing an elaborate and beautifully patterned structure. Although all snowflakes share this form, every specific one is different. A snowflake consists of large numbers of elements (water molecules) interacting through its crystalline structure. Each molecule is influenced only by local information (there is no external decision as to what the position of the molecule must be in the snowflake), but the relationships between the molecules are fixed. There are no real feedback loops and there is no evolution (except perhaps decay). As far as its structure is concerned, it is not really an open system. It is in temporary equilibrium, cannot adapt to its environment, and therefore quickly loses its structure. A snowflake, although wondrously complex in

appearance, is, therefore, only complicated. Let us then examine some truly complex systems.

The human brain is considered by many to be the most complex object known. Similarly, the language with which we communicate daily does not yield to analytical descriptions.

To frame our description, we must decide what our 'distance' from the system will be: in other words, what level of detail are we going to consider? If we stand far away, we could only consider the activity of large financial institutions - banks, large corporations, even countries. Obviously, a lot of smaller detail will get lost in the process. If we are going to examine the system in microscopic detail, we may have to keep track of the status of every individual penny. In that case we will run the risk of all meaningful patterns being obscured by the buzzing activity at the lower level.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The merest historical account has been given of Irish settlement at Crook and Billy Row within the context of period-changes - from the rural pre-industrialization of Crook and the Irish 'townland' to a developing semi-urban industrialized 'township' of mid nineteenth century Durham. Importantly, during this period, the Irish famine had intersected with growing opportunities for work in the expanding pit towns of County Durham.

A similar account of the development of communities from townland Ireland to township was given of the industrial demise at Crook in later years, which again demonstrated social dissipation to other places by many in the community. Illustrations of historical change from rural to urban societies are many and are relevant to this study (e.g. Tonnies, 1957;

Redfield,1947, 1968). Like the small cause of an environmental change had contributed to a catastrophic effect in Ireland in an earlier period, i.e. potato blight, so too, later changes at Crook showed that the small cause of cheaper coal had disastrously affected the social and economic stability of the community.

Set in a period of relative social stability, a statistical account of the Irish community and a description of some ensuing social conditions at Crook and Billy Row was provided, followed by a consideration of social and religious welfare support rendered through the State and the English Catholic Church - support that crucially contributed to a period of stability in the Irish community at Crook. The early Catholic Irish community at Crook was characterized by social mobility and unskilled employment. Crucially, as the Irish subsequently established themselves in Crook, many of them improved their occupational status and most of them developed the Catholic Church as a pivot of community life and as a social focus - much as it had been for them back in Ireland. This retained

their confidence in the new order, and they began to settle and strengthen their community.

It appears, therefore, that the Irish working-class of Crook assimilated into the dominant culture in a relatively effortless way, although not being dominated by it. The dominant culture in the Auckland Union, however, did not allow some to settle and they rejected a relatively high number of Irish paupers. The rejected individuals comprised mainly of economically dispossessed women unable to support themselves and their families. The situation in which these individuals found themselves was like that they would have experienced in the Irish poor law system. But away from home and in the increased industrial complexity of West Durham, there was less sympathy for unproductive non-workers. Here the dual problem of being Catholic, Irish, and unemployable in a work-ethic-rich community had guaranteed them expulsion.

As elsewhere in Britain, a valuable aspect of stability in the Irish community at Crook had been the education system and its adjunct, the Catholic Young

Men's Society. The relative absence of reports of Irish disorder, or its potential, in the west of County Durham confirms the comparatively innocuous and peaceful nature of Irish immigrants there from the late 1840's to the 1880's, in contrast to other parts of the country. The incidence of Irish-related disorder in many other areas of Britain was, indeed, considerably higher than in the Northeast. For instance, violent disorder in early Irish settlement in Wolverhampton – (Swift, 1986) sectarian violence in Stockport – (Millward, 1985; Newsinger, 1994).

The influence of the Catholic Church and Catholic Young Men's Society in west Durham cannot be underestimated in providing a strong element of the social control, reflected in this absence of disorder. For a sophisticated analysis of this point see Hickman, (1995). Yet, as late as the 1880's the young Irishmen of Crook were still reading reformist and nationalist literature like, Shamrock, Young Ireland and the Weekly Freeman while maintaining a peaceful composure. It is argued, therefore, that although assimilation was clearly occurring at this late period of

their history, the Irish at Crook had not been fully de-nationalised or politically disarmed by the State. They had yet failed to take on a well-defined alignment with the dominant English culture.

This inability to effectively remove all traces of Irish nationalism and culture from many in the Irish population of Crook can be seen in a personal example through Francis Harvey and the contents of his notebook, which we examined earlier. This illustrated not only his powerful religious faith and moral outlook but also his strong sense of free will and Irish identity. A complex interplay of all these, and many more influences, was taking place, which included his strong motivation to assimilate and succeed in the host culture.

Thus, the social system at Crook was far more complex than a simple claim that the relatively peaceful nature of the Irish community there was entirely due to the fact they had taken on the dominant culture. William Lowe's study of the Irish in Lancashire shows there were,

> …important limits on nationalist commitment among the Irish in England….. a sign of a once very distinct community becoming more like the rest of the population (Lowe, op. cit. pp 221).

Rather than seeing Irish communities in England as puppets of the State and religion, Lowe puts free will and the Irish themselves into the equation and demonstrates how they, against all social and economic odds, managed to create strong religious, cultural, and political communities while at the same time assimilating easily into the dominant culture. And the relatively *innocuous* interplay between economics, religion and politics, which Lowe discovered in Lancashire, is akin to the characteristics of the Crook Irish.

The period-changes described here occurred due to a complex and sensitive dependence on the social, economic, and environmental history of places. These places comprise complex social systems that cannot be described simply by lower order and single components of society. Accordingly, in seeking to provide some contextual sense to the history of the Irish immigrant community at Crook, the influential

theme of social change is not a simple one but one where geographically variable complex social systems are inherently 'multi-layered' and 'dissipative' and *globally* affect each other, so changing communities.

This social analysis has already been alluded to by Byrne (1998) in relation to the Irish Famine period and its social consequences in other places. Social historians have already shown clearly how this complex social systems analysis can provide a perfectly acceptable way of relating how local events, like those occurring in Ireland and Crook, affect a wider, worldview. See, for example, a historical study of revolution, (Artigiani, 1987, 1991). The point is exemplified further by Stewart in his historical analysis on the evolution of the Shoshonean-speaking North American Cahuilla Indians, (Stewart, 1955) and (1977). In doing so, these writers effectively elevate the use of local history studies to a more central position in historiography.

Such an interpretation, requiring a much wider empirical map and a greater detailed exposition than I

have presented here is *not,* however, a claim of this study. It is merely adverted as a pertinent model for use in more comprehensive studies concerning historical period changes in different, yet *decisively related*, and fateful geographical areas.

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